

Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Township Committee of the Township of Commercial, held on Monday, December 11, 2023, at 6:00 P.M., at the Township Hall, 1768 Main Street, Port Norris, NJ. The meeting was open to the public.

Those present:

Mike Vizzard	Mayor
Joseph Klaudi	Committeeman
Fletcher Jamison	Deputy Mayor
Heather Miller	Township Clerk
Leah Parmenter	Family Success Director

Mayor Vizzard called the meeting to order and announced that this special meeting has been advertised in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act. Notice of this special meeting of December 11, 2023, at 6:00 pm was advertised in the December 6, 2023, edition of the Daily Journal and the South Jersey Times and posted on the bulletin board of the municipal building and has remained consistently posted as required notices under statute.

Mayor Vizzard- Announced that the purpose of the meeting is to discuss the rental agreement for the Family Success Center located at 8879 Highland St., Port Norris, NJ. In attendance we have Leahe Parmenter, Manager of the Forest Lakes Family Success Center.

Mayor Vizzard- We are going to have a discussion of the current use of the Family Success space located within the Commercial Township Senior Center facility. Forrest Lakes Success Center has been provided a facility at 2009 Spring Garden Rd. The Township Municipality needs storage space.

Mayor Vizzard- We will start by asking you some questions to start the discussion.

Vizzard- What are you using the space at the senior center for?

Parmenter- We have staff and families that come there for services. We also use the senior center space for activities and events.

Vizzard- Are these things you can't do in Laurel Lake? And if so, why?

Parmenter- We do, do them in Laurel Lake. If I could, I brought a copy of the original agreement. A copy of the agreement was provided to the committee members.

Leah Parmenter- Wanted to present some history. In 2012, Commercial Township and the mayor at the time, with Inspira, collaborated. There was an RFP that went out for Commercial Township. In the RFP, the hospital applied and the agreement with the township, was if they were awarded the grant at the time, it would be the space in Port Norris within the Senior Center and Wi-Fi. Inspira's commitment was to provide staff, to pay utilities, and provide a certificate of insurance. Leahe continued that the majority of the money they get, which is \$240,000, is for this original place from 2012. In 2015, a proposal was written to DCF for the

addition of the Laurel Lake center, and they were awarded an additional \$108,000 a year. This was an expansion of the original site.

Leah Parmenter- Her concern is if she goes to DCF and tells them that they will no longer have the original site, that funding will be pulled from her. Leah proposed that she be allowed to maintain a couple of the offices and the common area.

Mayor Vizzard asked if she knew for sure that she would lose funding.

Leahe Parmenter- She did not but could only speak to previous experience having worked for DCF and under Governor Corzine, she established the Family Success Centers in New Jersey. With every Governor and administration check, everyone responds differently regarding funding. It is DCF that funds the program, not Inspira.

Mayor Vizzard asked why she gets so much for the Port Norris space as opposed to the Laurel Lake space.

Leah Parmenter replied that it is the location of the original grant. That the only reason she got the expansion funds is because there were Sandy funds, federal dollars. The \$108,000 is federal money. The original RFP that was written for the \$240,000 was for the Port Norris location. Additional funding could have been denied when gaining the Laurel Lake location for lack of funding, but the federal funds were available.

Mayor Vizzard- Under the terms and responsibilities under the partners part of this contract, if at any time funds are no longer available, SJH has the right to terminate contract upon written notice. SJH will continue to hold Commercial harmless and return the facility in the same condition. What they are talking about is the \$240,000 grant.

Leahe Parmenter- Yes.

Mayor Vizzard stated that he didn't understand why the Port Norris location would receive so much more funding than the Laurel Lake location.

Leah Parmenter explained that it is because the original RFP for Commercial Township was at the Port Norris location. It was a grant. The Laurel Lake location is an expansion, it is not a grant. It was not an RFP. It was a proposal she wrote explaining that the township purchased another building and additional funding would be needed to operate at the additional location.

Mayor Vizzard- questioned that she only needed a couple offices at that location.

Leahe Parmenter said that if she could have an office or two, and could still utilize the senior center, she didn't think she would be in jeopardy of losing funding.

There was a brief discussion of the space in the senior center being utilized by the Family Success center. It is Common/living room area, four offices and a restroom. Additional discussion continued as to the remaining space at the senior center and how it is being utilized.

The Director Cindy Tawes has an office, and the County has an office there for the food program that Clint said is used once or twice a month and it is a large space.

Mayor Vizzard expressed that in addition to the storage issue the township is having, the municipality does not have an emergency space to operate out of should a disaster happen at the township hall, as is required.

Mayor Vizzard wanted to make it clear that the township does not want to do anything that will take her funding away. Would like to find a resolution that will be beneficial to everyone. The mayor noted that there is nothing in the contract that says we must renew the lease for that location every year, but the township has. But the township needs an emergency place to operate from and a place for storage, and it needs to be a secure space. Leah Parmenter said she understood.

Mayor Vizzard said he wanted to decide tonight. He has already seen the building and knows what is there and does not want to wait. If there is enough space to share, and they will not lose funding, that could be a solution but that he would like to know for sure if we took the building back that the Family Success program would lose funding. The mayor expressed that Family Success has been provided a large space in Laurel Lake and that they are already doing everything out of that and that it doesn't make sense that they would lose funding.

There was additional conversation as to why the larger funding amount was being granted to the senior center location as opposed to the Laurel Lake location. Leahe reiterated that it is because it is the original location that was contained in the original RFP and that Laurel Lake was just an expansion. The mayor felt that Leahe could go to DCF and have the location changed.

Mayor Vizzard said he wanted her to try to get it resolved, get an answer and if the funding would get pulled, we would work something out. The mayor said he is appreciative for what Family Success does for the residents; he doesn't want them to lose funding. But that the township also has needs.

Mayor Vizzard stated that the current contract would expire in June of 2024. He will allow her 6 months to prepare to vacate the building if they will not lose funding. He would like her to go to her funder and tell them the township is giving her a different location to operate out of.

Leahe Parmenter explained that she already receives \$108,000 for the other location. She is still losing space and regardless, she would lose funding.

Mayor Vizzard pointed out that she hasn't operated out of the senior center space for two years. All activities and services take place in Laurel Lake.

Leahe Parmenter acknowledged that it has been at a minimum.

Mayor Vizzard wanted Leahe to understand the importance of the township's need for that space. He feels she should be able to go to the state and explain that she can do all her services at the larger location in Laurel Lake. The mayor offered to help, make calls, whatever he could to help her not lose funding. He just wants to know for sure she would lose funding. The mayor feels she hasn't utilized that building for a couple years when the township desperately needs space. It doesn't make sense why she still needs that space.

Leahe Parmenter said when she got the grant, she was told she had to serve 250 families in that location. When she got the expansion, they told her she needed to serve an additional 100 families. That's per year. She feels that because the original contract stipulates the Port Norris location serving 200 people, that it can be changed.

Clint Miller expressed that the funders do not understand that she is already serving 300 people in just Laurel Lake. Leah agreed that she exceeds the requirements in just Laurel Lake.

Mayor Vizzard pointed out that the contract says you need to serve 250 people at the Port Norris location but that right now, she isn't serving anyone from that location. Leah responded that she was serving people who are from Port Norris. Mayor replied she is service people from Port Norris at the Laurel Lake location, not the Port Norris location.

Leahe Parmenter said if she had to guess, they would take away the \$108,000 she gets from the Laurel Lake location and give her the \$240,000 she gets for Port Norris if she had to consolidate locations.

Mayor Vizzard felt that if she could show she has already been serving all the people at Laurel Lake, why would they take the funding.

Clint Miller suggested if she could show she is already reaching her numbers at just one location, wouldn't that help with your contract.

Leahe Parmenter conveyed that, if hypothetically, she had to go to the state and have that conversation, she would tell them the services, no one would be compromised. People would get services regardless. They are already exceeding what has been required. Last year they served 1,266 people. They provided 9,820 services. She would have that argument. Regardless, she still feels they will take that money away if she only has one location.

Clint Miller wanted to state for the record that no one there was there to hurt her. Leahe said she understood that. The township has done a lot for her, and she has done a lot for the community. Clint suggested talking to the county to see about utilizing the office at the senior center that they utilize because it is the largest office, and they only use it maybe twice a month.

Leahe Parmenter asked if she could keep one office and the living room/common area of her current space. Leahe indicated that should something disastrous happen, then the contract would null and void.

Mayor Vizzard felt that the decision that should be made tonight is that the township will not renew as of June 2024. That gives six months to find out if funding will be lost, if it was to be lost, what it would take to keep the funding. The mayor said he would be with her every step of the way through this. He was willing to go to any meeting to try and figure this out. The mayor doesn't see how the state can do this to her knowing that she has operated solely out of Laurel Lake for the past 5 years for the entire township.

Leahe Parmenter argued that there were some services offered from the Port Norris office.

Mayor Vizzard said that there is nothing in the contract that says the township must renew the contract. The township has, every year, on an annual basis, but it doesn't mean the township has to. The mayor wants to find out if there is a way, she can operate out of the Laurel Lake facility without losing any funding.

Leahe Parmenter wanted to clarify, she would have to be out by June 2024.

Mayor Vizzard said that was the decision they had to make but if she lost funding, they would figure something else out.

Leahe Parmenter said if she was to approach DCF, she would need something writing from the township saying they have to be out of there by June 2024.

Mayor Vizzard said it would be a letter stating the township would not be renewing the contract.

Deputy Mayor Jamison, Committeeman Klaudi and Clint Miller has a brief discussion about the county office being utilized for the food program and if that would be a feasible solution of a shared office for Family Success.

Mayor Vizzard said he did not want to hurt Cindy Tawes and her programs. All agreed.

Leahe Parmenter reiterated that she was hoping to have one or two offices and still be able to use the senior center. Even if it was one office, she could approach it as they are scaling back in that location but there would still be collaboration with the senior center and still utilize that space. With that, they may not take any funding away. That's what her hope was for tonight.

Clint Miller told her she still needed to work on finding out if she would in fact lose funding.

Leahe Parmenter said the only way she could do that is with a letter from the township. Then if they do, retract the letter, and tell them the township will work it out if it looks like funding will be lost.

Mayor Vizzard said if the township provides a letter, it will describe every reason why we are doing it. It would indicate that you are already operating out of Laurel Lake. That

building is not just for Family Success priorities but the entire township's priorities and that's why we are taking that building back. It's not that we want to kick you out of there.

Leahe Parmenter continued that if the township does this, people will lose their jobs and she would need to let people know in advance.

Mayor Vizzard wanted to know why people would lose their job if funding wasn't lost.

Leahe Parmenter said she wouldn't get the same amount of funding. If she did get the same amount, no one would lose their job.

Mayor Vizzard stressed that they do not want to see anyone lose their job. All they want is to be able to serve the residents in case of an emergency and for Family Success to continue doing what they do, in Laurel Lake.

Mayor Vizzard asked Leah if she had anything further. She said she did not.

Mayor Vizzard asked for a motion and a second to notify the Family Success Center that as of June 30, 2024, we intend to terminate the agreement based on all the reasons that were just discussed. If it comes back from the state that she is going to lose funding, we will re-visit this and come up with another plan.

Committeeman Jamison wanted to comment on something Clint Miller said. If she notifies the state that she is not going to be renewed, it is more than likely they will respond that she will not get the money. Do you think the letter should be sent now.

Mayor Vizzard and Leah Parmenter said yes.

Committeeman Jamison said once we give her that letter, and she takes it to the state, then they take her funding, I don't think the state is going to change their mind.

The discussion continued briefly as to whether it was a risk to issue the letter, and if it would jeopardize her losing the funding.

Leah Parmenter said she did have a question. If they say they are going to take money, and we come back to the table to talk about this, what is that going to look like? She wants to be prepared for that conversation.

Mayor Vizzard still doesn't see how they can take her funding when she has already been operating out of the one building and has successfully services all the residents in need. He understands the potential is there but feels that there is a compelling argument.

Leah Parmenter wanted to point out that prior to Covid, they did a substantial amount of work out of the Port Norris office. Covid changed everything.

Mayor Vizzard agreed, thank Covid has changed everything, and it is part of the reason why the township is doing what they are doing. This is the best step to moving forward.

Committeeman Klaudi made the motion.

Committeeman Jamison wanted better clarification as to what is being agreed upon.

Mayor Vizzard said that they were taking the approach as we are not renewing the contract. We are going to issue a letter stating that our intentions are not to renew the contract and our reasons why. We feel like she can operate out of one building, she has been doing that for the last couple of years. If it comes back that they have rules that say she needs an office there, we can look at it again and give her an office there, so they don't lose funding. For right now, I think we need to take that space back. We need that space.

Committeeman Jamison agreed that we need that space.

Leah Parmenter asked if she is told they will lose funding would she have a portion of the space.

Mayor Vizzard said she would not lose funding. The Committee will not allow her to lose funding. He is making that promise and that everyone there understands that. If they say she will lose funding, they will renew the lease. She may be reduced to one office. The mayor stated that he is leaning on her to prove to the state that she can and has operated out of one location.

Leah Parmenter still feels that they will pull the funding.

Mayor Vizzard said if that happens, they will retract and send another letter that we don't want her to lose the funding.

Mayor Vizzard- With that being said, there is a motion on the table. Do I have a second.

Committeeman Jamison seconded the motion. Roll call, all were in favor.

Mayor Vizzard stated that it was the decision of the committee not to renew the contract as of June 2024. With the understanding the Leaehe will help make the case that she can provide all the same services out of the Laurel Lake location. It is the promise of the committee, that if she is threatened of losing the funding, and upon proof from the state that she will lose funding, the committee will revise their decision.

Leahe Parmenter asked if she needed to provide something in writing from the state. Mayor Vizzard said yes.

Clint Miller suggested that Leahe could review the letter before it was officially submitted.

Leahe Parmenter said that she has good relationships at the state, and she is going to have some conversations. She also has a good relationship with Cindy Tawes, and she may still be able to utilize some space there from time to time.

With nothing further, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Heather Miller,
Township Clerk